

TWO TENNESSEE CLAY TOBACCO PIPE MAKERS

by
James L. Murphy
Ohio State University Libraries
1858 Neil Avenue Mall
Columbus, OH 43210

Two white clay reed stem tobacco pipes obtained recently can be attributed to James Newton Rice and his nephew, James Henry Rice, of Covington, Tipton Co., Tennessee. Such pipes date to the late 19th and early 20th C. and have not previously been reported in the literature on Tennessee potteries (Smith and Rogers 1979) or historic clay pipes (Sudbury 1979). Smith and Rogers have documented five West Tennessee pottery sites that produced clay tobacco pipes but reported none for Tipton Co.

Both pipes were purchased on eBay, but the sellers could provide no detailed knowledge of their origin: Fortunately, one is marked in raised letters, "J.N. RICE/MAKER," which led to a Rice family genealogist, Ms. Elisa J. von Rice, who has been able to provide information on these unrecorded clay pipe makers.

James Newton Rice lived in Covington, Tipton Co., Tennessee, about 35 miles northeast of Memphis, where his father, James C. Rice, had moved from Virginia around 1833. The 1860 census lists 21-year-old James N. Rice, but it is not known when he began pipe making, which must have been an occupation subsidiary to the family farming. The 1860 census also shows James N. Rice's four-month-old nephew, James H., living in the home of his parents, Cyrus C. and Martha V. Rice, in Covington.

Cyrus C. Rice was severely wounded in the Battle of Fort Pillow (April 12, 1864) and brought home on a horse-drawn litter but died of his wounds. His widow Martha Freezor Rice died around 1870 and the children were raised by Cyrus' brother and sister. By this time, James N. Rice was a 31-year-old farmer with three children of his own, but he also took his 10-year-old nephew, James H. Rice, to rear as well. It is not known when James N. began making

clay pipes but it is doubtful if it was much before 1870. He obtained the white clay from a nearby river-bank and fired them in a kiln in his backyard. The family lived on Holly Grove Road, on the south edge of Covington.

The one available pipe marked on the right side of the stem in raised letters, reads "J.N. RICE/MAKER" and is decorated with a series of raised lines on both the stem and back of the bowl. The bowl is in the form of a human head & with rather detailed eyes, including raised dots for the pupils. Height of the pipe is 43.3 mm; bowl diameter, 28.6; length 41.9 mm. Stem diameter is 20.3 and stem hole diameter, 9.6 mm. Actual thickness of the bowl wall is about 5.4 mm and of the stem, 5.0-6.4, so this is a very sturdy pipeform. This pipe is illustrated in Figure 1.

According to Mrs. von Rice, James Henry Rice learned pipe-making from his uncle and later made pipes himself. When his cousin (James N.'s son), Daniel Barnum Rice (b. 1878), ran for Tipton County Sheriff, James H. made 5,000 pipes for him to hand out during the campaign, charging him five cents each for these. At this time it is not known how effective these were in the campaign. The molds for the pipes were still in existence as late as 1966. That the Rice family made pipes in considerable quantities is also witnessed by a family photograph of J.N. Rice with a wagon load of pipes he took to sell in St. Louis.

The second Rice pipe available is impressed "Tennessee" on the forehead but is not otherwise marked. According to Mrs. von Rice, "The James Henry Rice pipes had JH Rice on the bowl. JH also made pipes that had the word TENNESSEE down the bowl." (e-mail, 13 Sept. 2005). On this basis, the second pipe is attributed to James Henry Rice. This pipe is shown in Figure 2. It measures 47.0 mm

high, with bowl diameter of 30.1 mm and maximum length of 49.9 mm. Stem diameter is 20.0 and stem hole diameter, 10.2 mm. Actual thickness of the bowl wall is 3.8-4.5 mm and of the stem wall, 5.1-5.9.

Frontal views of both pipes are shown in Figure 3, and Figure 4 illustrates the base of the unmarked pipe. Both pipes have a distinctive raised circle on the base of the bowl, perhaps to enhance stability when the pipe was laid down with the bowl mouth upward, though the raised circle may merely have been decorative, as it does not function particularly well for the purpose suggested.

Given the fact that J.N. Rice is known to have sold his pipes in St. Louis, examples might be expected in historic archaeological sites anywhere along the central Mississippi River Valley. White clay tobacco pipes were made in other states as well, including North Carolina and Virginia, so that stylistic differences remain the best means of distinguishing Rice tobacco pipes. As more are discovered, hopefully in specific archaeological contexts, a better idea of which were made by James N. Rice and which by his nephew may be developed.

References

- Smith, Samuel, and Stephen T. Rogers
1979 *A Survey of Historic Pottery Making in Tennessee*. Tennessee Dept. of Conservation, Division of Archaeology, Research Series 3.
- Sudbury, Byron
1979 *Historic Clay Tobacco Pipemakers in the United States of America. BAR International Series 60; The Archaeology of The Clay Tobacco Pipe*, Peter Davey, ed.



Figure 1 (Murphy) Tennessee Clay Pipe Marked J.N. Rice Maker."



Figure 3 (Murphy) Front of Rice Pipes.



Figure 2 (Murphy) Pipe Marked "Tennessee" on Forehead



Figure 4 (Murphy) Base of Rice Pipe Marked "Tennessee."